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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

4367

SUBJECT: Berlin

DATE: March 21, 1963
TIME: 2:30 p.m.
PLACE: Under Secretary's
Conference Room

PARTICIPANTS: Germans

Dr. Heinrich von Brentano, Chairman, CDU Bundestag Faction
and former German Foreign Minister
Heinrich Knappstein, German Ambassador
Mr. Hermann Kusterer, Interpreter

COPIES TO:

Americans

The Secretary
The Under Secretary
Mr. Robert M. Brandin, GER

COPIES TO: See page 3.

During the meeting with Dr. von Brentano, the Secretary had to leave briefly and Dr. von Brentano asked Mr. Ball how the U. S. assessed the Soviet willingness to resume talks on Berlin.

Mr. Ball replied it was hard to say. We sensed a considerable disarray inside the USSR with strong forces moving against each other. For example, there was a force for reconciliation with China which might indicate a hard line on Berlin. There was pressure to allocate resources for military purposes. Agricultural policies had failed and there was increasing consumer demand. These forces apparently distracted the USSR from other problems. We did not get the impression of a strong sense of purpose on the Soviet side regarding the Berlin talks but there might be internal reasons which would induce the USSR to put forth new proposals. We are also puzzled by conflicting Soviet actions--e.g., the apparently sincere Soviet interest in a test agreement versus the rigid position on limiting on-site inspections to two or three rather than ten, which was really a relative matter. Khrushchev was obviously not happy. We did not know why but we were waiting to see what would happen. Mr. Ball asked what Donn's appraisal was.

Dr. von Brentano said the Federal Government fully agreed that the resumption of talks was necessary because the world situation would not permit a priori rejection. The Federal Government was not optimistic, however, because willingness to talk did not indicate a change in position. Soviet policy was burdened in

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- 2 -

two ways. First there was the internal criticism against the agricultural situation, production priorities and administrative policies, which indicated unrest. The economic situation was bad. Second there was the conflict with China. The Communist system could not admit peaceful co-existence because by nature it had to be dynamic. This made it difficult for Khrushchev to explain his views to his supporters inside Russia and abroad. Togliatti and other foreign communists in turn had difficulty in justifying their position. At the same time there was steady Chinese criticism that it was treasonable to believe in peaceful solutions. Dr. von Brentano observed that critics inside the USSR might be more dangerous today than under Stalin.

Later the Secretary said that he expected to see the Soviet Ambassador next week to discuss the Berlin question. He noted that the USSR did not seem to be in a hurry and had framed the objective of the talks in the same old words.

Dr. von Brentano agreed it was the same old formula and not the better for repetition.

The Secretary humorously added that it was his ambition to hand Berlin to his successor.

Dr. von Brentano replied that the Federal Government was also modest in its aims.

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